

Working with targeted groups case study

Development of a welsh learners and speaking walking group with Valeways.



Dewch i
Gerdded
Let's
Walk

cerdded am oes
walk4life

sportwales
chwaraeoncymsu

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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Introduction

Valeways began in 1996 when a group of walkers came together as an action group to work collaboratively with the Vale of Glamorgan Council and landowners to open up public rights of way in the county. Valeways is now a constituted charity with one full-time and two part-time staff members, working in three main areas: promotion of walking routes, maintenance and improvements to the public rights of way network in the Vale, and guided walking.

The guided walking currently funded by Let's Walk Cymru grew out of earlier schemes for health walking. There is a quarterly core programme of health walks all around the county, led by a team of 13 volunteer walk leaders. On average, there are two walks per week, open to anyone. There are about 350 walkers registered, and walkers come to whichever of the walks they wish. Most walks are around 60 – 90 minutes, but there are also extended walks of around 2 – 3 hours for people who have become fitter, and shorter walks of 30 – 40 minutes for the less able.



Valeways staff co-ordinate the programme, but as the co-ordinator notes, “I’m a facilitator, our ethos is to release the potential of the volunteers”. He sends out a template to the volunteers who use this to provide information about the walks they will lead in the following quarter. Although there are occasional meetings, he finds that email is an increasingly effective way to reach out to the busy volunteers. The co-ordinator maintains the programme marketing.

In addition to the main health walks programme, there is a regular walk for Welsh learners and speakers. When the current co-ordinator came into post, he felt that Valeways’ Welsh language walk promotion materials were an under-used resource, so decided to try putting a Welsh walk into the guided walking programme. As a Welsh learner himself, this was also a personal interest.

Benefits and achievements in relation to working with 'targeted' groups



The 'Welsh learners and speakers' walk has been a popular introduction, and now attracts an average of 10 – 12 people each time from around 50 people who have registered an interest. The co-ordinator continues to act as walk leader on a voluntary basis, now sharing this with two other volunteers. The group have become good friends, and have begun to go away on walking breaks as well as their regular monthly walks. They tend to choose Welsh-speaking areas such as West Wales and the Brecon Beacons where they will hear Welsh around them.

One of the group has volunteered to maintain a Facebook page for the Welsh walk. In this way, the walks are promoted to people through event notifications, and photos from the walks are posted for people to share. The Valeways co-ordinator also uses more traditional forms of marketing, reaching out to specialised Welsh language interest organisations to publicise the walks, including Menter Y Fro and Menter Caerdydd, as well as providers of Welsh adult education courses and local English and Welsh medium schools.

The Vale of Glamorgan is an area of Wales where Welsh is less spoken although Cardiff and the surrounds are a growth area. The aim is for an informal and social walk where the standard of Welsh – or even using Welsh all the time – is not important; rather it is about the group offering an outlet for people to use their Welsh. For learners, it is a much less artificial environment than the

classroom, and they can use the language “in a more comfortable, social sense”. For Welsh speakers, it offers them an opportunity to support others to learn Welsh. Advice to those new to owning a guide-dog or about to take one on for the first time.

- For Valeways, the Welsh walk enables them to support the Welsh language, and is an active demonstration of the organisation's commitment to it. As the co-ordinator notes, “It is a small but meaningful part of what Valeways does”. It feeds into Valeways' other work, e.g. taking Welsh and English on to an equal footing through beginning to produce bilingual walk guides (rather than the separate English and Welsh guides that were produced before).
- For the co-ordinator, the walks have offered personal development. As well as giving him a chance to use his Welsh during the walks and in their co-ordination and marketing, it has reinforced to him “how Welsh should be a feature of all of my work”.
- For the Welsh speaking walkers, they have developed a sense of pride through helping others to feel comfortable speaking Welsh and to learn more.

Success Factors



The co-ordinator mentions a few things that have helped to make the Welsh walk successful:

- ✎ They are not trying to make it completely Welsh-speaking, which means that it is welcoming and inclusive to anyone with an interest in Welsh even if they are only just beginning to learn.
- ✎ His own personal commitment. He notes that this is important in any small organisation, that there is a need for someone pro-active who can develop ideas, as he did for the Welsh walk.
- ✎ It is a simple concept, and they have been able to promote it well.

Challenges

When the walks first began, they attracted quite a few people who were not committed to the concept of speaking Welsh (but rather to the fact that the walks tended to be longer than many of those in the main Valeways programme). To overcome this, the co-ordinator encouraged these people to join appropriate walks in the core programme, and most importantly, separated out the Welsh walk from the core and now markets it separately. In this way, it is clear that it is for an audience with a Welsh language interest.



Self-sufficiency and looking forwards



- ↘ The co-ordinator's aspiration for the Welsh walking group is to gradually grow its membership, "as a slow burner around the healthy core". He sees opportunities for more marketing through schools, attracting parents and children.
- ↘ He notes that the Welsh walking group – and other Valeways groups – need to be ready to take things on for themselves. Although he currently co-ordinates the Welsh walk's programme, he feels that group members would be able to take this on as there is only a small amount of administration work and that "people in it won't let it die as it's become so sociable". He comments that there isn't always a need for funding as it is such a simple concept.
- ↘ For any group to be self-sufficient, the co-ordinator believes that there needs to be someone acting as the driver for it, someone with the passion and interest to make things happen. Some groups may choose to become formalised, others may remain very informal. He notes that the latter option is quicker to set up, tends not to create a resource need and may be easier to maintain, but a more formal structure may be necessary if providing walks for other people.
- ↘ Valeways is an independent charity, so can already be considered as a self-sufficient enterprise, drawing on a variety of funding sources to carry out its activities. This model has enabled the organisation to work in the Vale for many years now. The support from

Let's Walk Cymru has given Valeways financial support for their health walk programme, in particular paying for officer time. The co-ordinator appreciates the flexibility of the programme which enables him to work independently and does not impose a heavy monitoring burden. Also, he notes that Let's Walk Cymru has provided an external support structure, including a training programme and third party insurance for the volunteer walk leaders, and a sounding board for the co-ordinator. Valeways as a whole has benefited from the national profile and validation that association with Sport Wales brings.

The most significant difference this scheme has made

We asked the co-ordinator to complete the following sentence,

"In my view, the most significant difference that the Welsh walking group makes for the people who take part is.....giving people a chance to chat socially in Welsh".

Contact:
Valeways
Tel: 01446 749000
Email: info@valeways.org.uk
Web: www.valeways.org.uk